

LEARNING RESOURCE

OBJECT FOCUS: THE TYRE SWAN

ENGLISH Stages 3 & 4



SEE

What can you see?

Materials
Colours
Shapes

THINK

What do you think about this object?

What words come to mind when you think of this object?
Why do you think it is in the Museum's collection?
If you held an exhibition, what other objects might you include with this one? What would the exhibition be about?

WONDER

What do you wonder about this object?

Who made it?
How was it made? What was the first step? Was it difficult?
Why did they use those materials?
What creature could you make using the same materials?
What other materials could you use?

CREATE

Write a short paragraph describing the object for someone who has never seen it.

Perhaps your paragraph is from the perspective of the maker?
Or the object?

LEARNING RESOURCE

OBJECT FOCUS: THE TYRE SWAN



THE TYRE SWAN

Tyre swans were homemade sculptures people displayed in their gardens in the suburbs of postwar Australia. The base of the swan could hold soil, so plants were often grown inside them. They were deceptively simple to make; the swan's delicate neck is formed by slicing half the tread away from the wall of the rubber tyre in a gradual curve. We know roughly how old this one is because tyres started to be reinforced with steel belts after the 1950s; cutting through a tyre that has a steel belt is impossible.

The empty space where the head was cut from becomes a forked tail. The tyre is then turned inside out, a metal strap fixes the graceful neck in position and the whole swan is nailed to a rectangular piece of wood for display. Lastly, the figure is painted white and the details of the red beak and red drawing-pin eyes complete the illusion.

Objects can go in and out of fashion with their owners or popular culture as time passes. The tyre swan was initially well received but became less popular in the latter part of the 20th century. During this period, owners may have removed them from their gardens, storing them or even throwing them away. Recently, however, tyre swans have been reappraised, leading to recognition of their place in time and a new appreciation for their ornamental and cultural value.

Through the lens of a museum collection, the tyre swan can be viewed as craft, decorative recycling, a product of mid-century suburban ideals, or even as a kitsch or retro item.

WORD BANK

Kitsch: Describes objects that are considered to be in poor taste, or inferior to 'high art' but appreciated ironically or knowingly for their often humorous qualities and sentimental value.

Postwar: The time after a war, typically associated with World War II.

Suburban: An area where people live that surrounds or is separated from the city, but within commuting distance.

Ornament: An object that is used to decorate or beautify.

Popular culture: Refers to what is popular in general society; this could include beliefs, values, practices or objects.

Reappraised: Looked at or assessed something or someone in a new way.